

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

"With the high cost of fencing materials and low cattle prices, the EQIP program has helped us to construct fences in order to accomodate our cattle operation through management control of grazing," said Book St. Goddard, whose family has a cow/calf operation on approximately 6,000 acres of owned and leased land on the Blackfeet Reservation.

photo: USDA-NRCS

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary conservation program that provides technical, financial, and educational assistance to farmers and ranchers. This effective environmental program helps producers address the top priority natural resource conservation concerns, which in Montana are water quality, grazing land health, and water quantity. Implementing certain conservation practices, such as fencing, windbreaks, and livestock watering facilities, help to improve grazing distribution and water quality. Irrigation water conveyance systems and irrigation water management plans increase water quality and help to ensure more water remains in streams and rivers. Streambank stabilization and riparian revegetation improves water quality and benefits wildlife and fisheries.

Locally Led Program

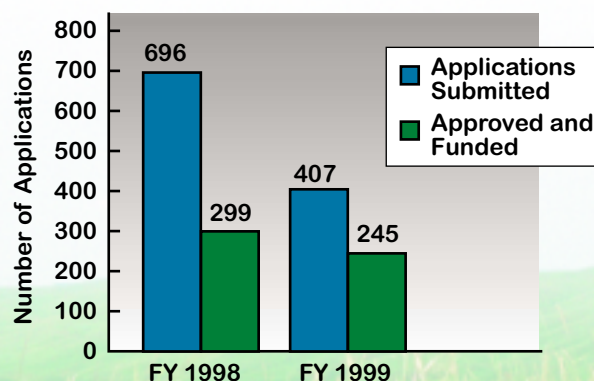
EQIP funds are distributed to address priority natural resource issues within and statewide natural resource concerns outside designated priority areas. The priority areas and priority issues are identified at the local (community or watershed) level through a local work group and are reviewed and supported by the State Technical Committee (STC). The STC consists of representatives from state and federal agencies, and agricultural organizations including NRCS; Farm Service Agency; conservation districts; Montana Stockgrowers Association; Montana Audubon Society; Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks; Farm Bureau; Montana's seven American Indian reservations, and many more. Both

local work groups and the STC provide NRCS valuable recommendations for program implementation.

Financial Assistance

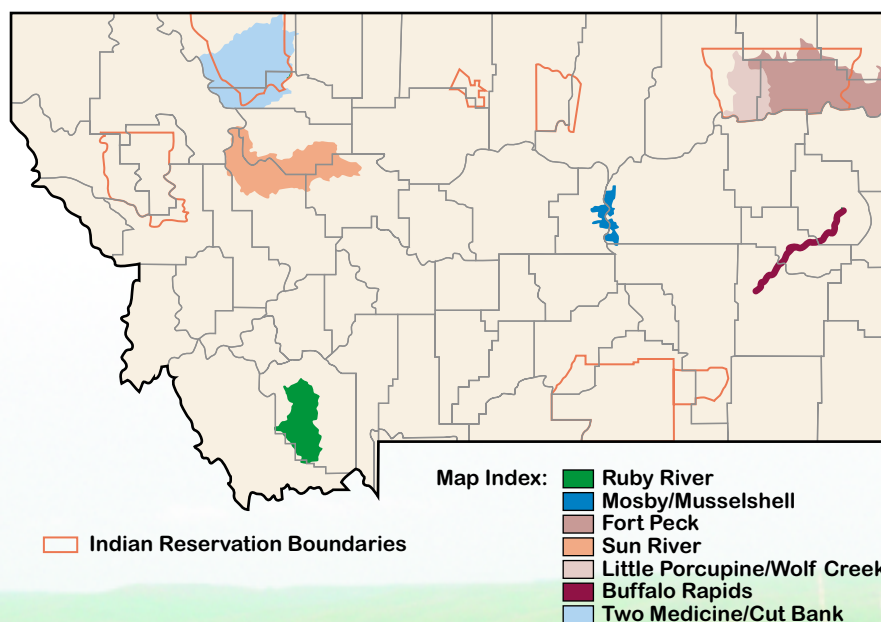
EQIP requires the establishment of a 5 to 10 year contract and the development of an NRCS approved conservation plan. Producers are encouraged to develop comprehensive or total resource management plans. Cost sharing may pay up to 75 percent of the cost of certain conservation practices. Incentives may be made to encourage a producer to perform land management practices, such as nutrient and manure management, integrated pest management, irrigation water management, and wildlife habitat management. Total cost share and incentive payments are limited to \$10,000 per person per year and \$50,000 over the life of the contract.

EQIP Program Applications



Priority Areas and Objectives for 1999

Priority Issue	Financial Assistance	Purpose & Benefits	Contracts Funded
Water Quality	\$268,738	Improve water quality in the state.	
Water Quantity	\$268,738	Improve instream flows for fish by reducing amounts drawn for irrigation.	
Grazing Land Health	\$1,071,001	Improve range health thereby increasing species diversity, reducing erosion, and improving wildlife habitat.	
Priority Area			
Ruby River Watershed	\$473,183	Improve water quality and instream flows for fisheries in the Ruby River.	10
Mosby/Musselshell River	\$452,003	Improve instream flows and rangeland health.	14
Fort Peck Reservation	\$649,997	Improve grazing land health and ground/surface water quality.	57
Sun River Watershed	\$209,909	Improve water quality by reducing stream bank erosion, sediment loading and animal nutrient loading in the Sun River; improve grazing land health.	19
Little Porcupine Creek Watershed	\$396,806	Improve grazing land health and water quality degradation caused by poor irrigation practices.	33
Buffalo Rapids Project	\$428,497	Improve water quality in the Yellowstone River (nitrate loading).	6
Two Medicine/Cut Bank Watershed	\$395,128	Reduce water quality degradation caused by poor irrigation practices and improve grazing land health.	20
Totals	\$4,614,000		



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